

4 - Rich 'Records' Drops the Mic by DeTrashmouth

Category: It

Genre: Drama, Humor

Language: English

Characters: Richie T.

Status: Completed

Published: 2019-10-07 06:14:59

Updated: 2019-10-07 06:14:59

Packaged: 2019-12-12 01:27:05

Rating: M

Chapters: 1

Words: 6,704

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Part 4 in this tale is when things truly begin to get tragic. After so many years of failure, he has finally made it as a semi-successful comedian and is living the dream, which eventually may become a nightmare.

4 - Rich 'Records' Drops the Mic

Rich 'Records' Tozier needed a powder.

Just one line, one little bump.

Just enough to give him that punch of energy that he was known for bringing out on stage. He thought he'd been doing pretty good for not touching the stuff since he and Sandy got married, but now his hands were shaking and he was out on stage, facing the crowd with his rapidly pacing heart. And he was regretting his refusal of that bump that had been offered to him backstage from his opening act, just moments before walking out into the spotlight.

The crowd roared and cheered as they always did. The tickets weren't cheap, and giving his audience the show they deserved was always high on his agenda. At least, it used to be. In the beginning of his career he didn't even need drugs to give him that zest of hyperactivity that he was known for having on stage. No, not even 'him,' not Richie Tozier, that old fuckin' Trashmouth. 'Rich Records,' the onstage persona he presented himself as to the public. A character in his own right, just like the others he created by means of impressions and voices. He didn't just tell jokes on stage; he created scenarios in which all the characters he'd come up with got involved and would play the situations out like scenes in a film. It got the audience involved, memorized in the act, waiting for the big punchline to each joke.

But he knew the truth in those lies. There was no goddamn punchline. Richie Tozier, he himself was the biggest joke of them all.

'Careful what you wish for,' the old saying goes. That and; *'Money can't buy happiness.'*

Two pieces of wisdom Richie had outright ignored, laughing them off as if they were jokes in and of themselves. He wished for fame, to be like the greats, the guys he spent his youthful years idolizing... and he got it. Richie had become one of them, getting the laughs and applause he begged for and being invited out to all the Hollywood parties. With the fame, of course, came the fortune. Being a poor kid

from Maine, Richie found himself drunk on success long before he ever even went near the actual bottle. He splurged on expensive, custom-designer clothes and material things that he had no purpose buying. He bought them simply because he could, things that were just so... not Richie Tozier. The cars, furniture, some stuff he bought just to buy and show off he had the money in his name to do so. When as a kid, He never thought he'd see a thousand dollars in real life, now he was squandering five-K here, ten-G there, always on things that he didn't even think twice about, nor did he give two fucks for to have. Looking around his luxurious playboy penthouse, he felt like a stranger in his own home. Hell, he barely recognized himself in his own reflection anymore.

Richie Tozier was on a high, eventually becoming the great 'Rich Records,' the funny voices guy; the 'Thank you, Fuck you, and Until next time' guy. But it wasn't him. It just wasn't him anymore. He no longer felt at home on the stage as he once did, in fact his anxiety was often doing all the work for him, he let his characters take the lead as he himself tended to be on auto-pilot.

"So, my girlfriend caught me masturbating to her friends' Facebook page," Richie said into the microphone. The crowd giggled. "And now I'm in masturbaters anonymous. I stand up at the first meeting and I say, 'My name is Richie Tozier, and I am an addict.' Afterwards it occurred to me that this was supposed to be anonymous. It only got even more awkward when I saw the friend in the same meeting who I'd been masturbating to. I point at her and go," he switched to a Shaggy voice from Scooby-Doo, "*Zoinks, man! heh... you're like, totally the reason why I'm here!*" Richie screeched in the raspy voice.

The crowd lost it. If only they'd known that like with most comedians, his jokes were just a comedic twist on true events.

Richie Tozier would in fact go to rehab, but not for sexual addiction. Over the years he would develop a taste for coke, and not the soda. Starting small at first, being invited to the elaborate Hollywood parties that other comedians and celebrities would often frequent in the after hours. Sure, he'd have an over-priced beer when offered by the bartender, which was on the house to him for being invited over as a talent. Then the harder liquor came, whiskey, bourbon, a shot of tequila here and there. Why not? It was a party.

Feeling the buzz coming on, he would excuse himself from telling jokes and doing voices to get a breath of fresh air out on the balcony, where the smokers lounged. Sure, he'd take a cigarette when it was offered to him; why not? It was just one cigarette, and then it was just one pack. It eased the stress of having to constantly perform, just like alcohol took the edge off. And then it was marijuana. Why not? His lungs had already gotten accustomed to breathing in smoke from the cigarettes, and although weed had a different odor to it, it was all basically the same. Where his preferred brand of Winston's took the stress off, the party favor grass made him feel light-headed and calm, tired even. Also, made him crave Taco Bell like nothing else in this world.

So here was Richie in the early 2000's, chain-smoking cigarettes, taking shots and drinking the good, hard, expensive stuff, and riding his slow highs out from the pot. Soon he began just buying it all on his own, no longer thinking of it as social or party favors. And the crazy part is, it worked, it all did help him function on stage. Maybe not so much the weed, as he went through a period where his jokes and performance were criticized for being low-energy and a whole hour about food. Though his joke about the Scooby-gang all being a bunch of stoned hippies who only THOUGHT they were going around solving mysteries seemed to always get a pretty good laugh, which is why he still incorporated the Shaggy voice into his current act. It was nostalgia at that point. Most the time he just seemed to hurry through his set, not even thinking about the jokes anymore. The only lingering thought on his mind was doing his time so he could get back stage and get his next fix. His next smoke, his next drink. Fuck the fans, this was about him and his needs. They should have been grateful for the time he spent entertaining them.

The fame only took him so far, it got his foot in the door for the parties and the fortune merely paid his way to getting everything he could find. He drew the line at injecting himself with anything, even Richie had his limits. And a decade ago he surely never would have even entertained the notion of putting anything up his nose. But he could never say no to showing up to a party, never say no to an offer one of his old timey idols threw out to him. So instead of saying 'no,' Richie Tozier found himself saying, 'why not?' And this began his addiction to cocaine. In a way it was like steroids for comedians, it

gave them just the right amount of zest they needed to get out on that stage and treat their comedy with high energy. Richie's shows were compared to Rock n' Roll concerts and he felt as if he could fly. There was no stopping him.

And then there was Sandy.

"All I'm saying," Steve continued as he led Richie through the party. "Is. your material has taken kind of a dark turn here and there. Maybe it wouldn't hurt to have some of our people write a few bits for you. We have some good writers on our staff, Rich!" "I'm not telling other people's jokes," Richie scoffed at him. "That's like, the comedian's code, man. You write your own set. You go out, live life, and put a comedic twist on it. Almost any situation can be made into a joke-"

Richie stopped talking when he laid his eyes on her for the first time.

Cassandra Wirt was an acquaintance of Steve Covall, Richie's talent agent. She worked as a secretary for the law firm associated with the agency. Of course being a secretary was not what she spent four years in college studying law for, but as she had said, 'you gotta start somewhere.' And it was true. Richie had spent much of his last years trying to bury the memories of when he was a mere opener and performing at bars and clubs in the Valley of Hollywood.

Meeting Sandy was a game changer for Rich, she was drop dead gorgeous from first looks. He'd never believed love at first sight until all four of his eyes were laid upon her. Mermaid length flowing dirty-blonde hair, only slightly tanned and with the right amount of cute little freckles that sprinkled her face. She was wearing a business suit, fresh from work the first night he met her at the party, standing outside on the balcony with her hair down and the first few buttons of her blouse casually undone. She was smoking a Parliament, casually leaning over the railing and looking down at the gigantic shimmering pool beneath them. Usually there was a crowd outside, but not tonight.

Steve Covall brought Richie outside to meet her, leading him away from the music of Elton John's "Bennie and the Jets" playing from inside the mansion (it wasn't played from an iPod, either. Elton

himself was sitting at the piano, treating his guests to a classic tune.) But at that moment, Richie hadn't even been fazed by the artist just in the other room, he'd drowned out every word his manager spoke to him, except of course, when he introduced the woman outside.

"Rich Tozier, may I present Cassandra Wirt," Steve said.

"Sandy,' please," she said exhaling a cloud of smoke into the air and exchanging her cigarette to her left hand, so she could extend her right for Richie to shake. "Cassandra sounds so formal, I thought these were our off-hours, Steve?"

Richie took her hand, but did not shake it. Instead, he felt his fingers go numb with tingles as he reached down and kissed it. But he said nothing.

"Cat got your tongue?" She teased, then looked at Steve. "I thought you said this was the one that never stops running his mouth?" Sandy giggled to Steve. "Come on, you can't look at me like that and not say anything."

Steve jabbed Rich with his elbow.

"Sorry. I .. sorry. I'm Tozier. Rich. Richie- Sorry." He mumbled. Sandy took her hand back and grinned, daringly.

"So, Mr. Tozier, is this business or pleasure?"

"*What's the fun of business without a little pleasure?*" He quipped. Words that would come back to haunt him.

"I like the way you think," Sandy said.

Okay, so maybe it had been lust at first sight instead of love. But the two of them ended up spending the whole night talking and then went back to his place to do a little partying in private and to talk about the difference between Maoism and Trotskyism, so to speak. Richie Tozier had fallen, and boy oh boy, did he fall hard. She was his first real romance after a few awkward shambles with some women which had turned out to be nothing more than one night stands. With Sandy, it wasn't just sex. He felt as if he were making love for the first actual time in his life. She would always fall asleep

in his arms, and this continued for two years.

"Hey, wanna go to Vegas and get married?" He had asked her spontaneously one night.

"..What?" Sandy asked. "Are you being serious right now or is this another joke? You really want to get married? "

"*Why not?*" Richie said with a smile.

And so that's what they did. When he was around her, he felt as if nothing else mattered in the world. This, here, now, this was what life was truly about. This was the meaning of pure happiness, that he knew was bound to last forever.

At first.

They had decided to legalize their relationship, and sometimes Richie thought that's where all their real problems truly began. It stopped being a partnership and at that point, barely even resembled anything like a relationship. No relationship is walking on sunshine 24/7, and they had their problems just like everybody else. Little things at first, her snarky comments that he fought back with his own sarcasm, nothing they couldn't just laugh about later on. But she began trying to change him, suggesting he trade his old specs in for contacts (which he hated) and picking out what wardrobe he should wear.

"No more Hawaiian shirts," she said. "Are you a child, or a fucking man?"

"Maybe I'm a professional man-child," he smirked. She did not find that at all humorous.

"Yeah," she said back to him, dryly. "Sometimes I think you are. You're really not as funny as you seem to think you are sometimes, Rich."

That hurt. Of all the things she had said to him leading up to this moment, and even some of the things she'd say to him in the future, that comment stuck with him the most.

Eventually, everything became about her. Sure, he couldn't argue that she deserved to be happy and should still pursue a career, which led him to get a vasectomy so some little Tozier bastard wouldn't ruin her chances. But after two years, Sandy had become the bane of his existence. Depression slowly crept in, and more and more he saw the big loser she made him out to be.

So, he sought comfort elsewhere. He began going to parties alone instead of inviting her to come with him, drinking his sorrows away and picking his old habit back up. The drugs took the edge off, they made him not feel like the big piece of untalented shit that she constantly assured him he was. It didn't help that one night when he was coked out and took to the stage, he decided to share one of their more personal moments with the crowd.

"You guys know what a 'cuckold' is?" Richie had asked into the microphone. "It's when someone gets off on seeing their wife getting fucked by someone else. This is a thing, legit, it's a fetish. And as it turns out, I do not share the views as the guys who thrive for this little act of adultery..."

Richie let the laughter die down, staring into the abyss of darkness of the crowd. "My wife has been fucking around on me. It was a dirty little secret at first, but then the other night I walked in on it. Some guy, don't know him, he still mostly had his business suit on, though. Fucking my wife in our home, our bed." Something was different about his tone that night. While he usually couldn't help but to awkwardly smile and even chuckle at his own jokes, Richie more looked like he was a broken man on the verge of tears.

"Of course she tried to write it off as, 'oh, this is the first time it's ever happened,'" Richie said in a squawking voice that mimicked Sandy's. "And 'he doesn't mean anything to me. He just works for my boss, this is how I get a heads up in the game. It's social politics, blah blah blah, babble babble babble.'" Everyone laughed at the bit, but it wasn't a joke. And Sandy did not find the incident funny.

"This is our life, Rich!" She'd screamed at him. "Not some joke you just take to the stage and tell a bunch of strangers!"

Why he still bothered to stay with her by then was a joke all in and

of itself. His wife, the emotionally abusive cheating whore who was fucking her way through life. Fucking everybody but him, by this point. It had been months since she even touched him or allowed herself to fall asleep in his arms. Despite being so close in their bed, she might as well had been miles apart from him by then.

"Isn't it, though?" Richie asked after rising up from snorting another line of coke. She had her fun, he had his. Richie turned around and put his stereo on, hoping the noise would drown out the sounds of their argument from anyone within earshot. The last thing he needed was to be a cover-story for TMZ again. 'Gimme Shelter' by The Rolling Stones began blaring in the house.

"Look at you," Sandy shouted at him. "Snort it up, you fucking coke-head."

"Hey, fuck off. I quit," Richie said. "I quit for the longest time because I didn't need this shit. All I needed was you, this, our life together. Until you decided I wasn't enough for you and had to start fucking everyone at your goddamn office!"

"Once!" Sandy shouted back. "I fucked one other man, once!"

"Yeah, bullshit. You think I didn't know about all your little late nights at the office? All those little giggles while you sat there texting people, thinking I wasn't paying attention? Flirting with people the way you used to flirt with me? You're a fucking manipulative slut who just uses sex as a weapon to crawl up the ladder of life, Sandy. Good for fucking you."

("What's the fun of business without a little pleasure?" He had quipped the night they met. And now here he stood, those words coming back to haunt him)

"Well at least I'm happy!" Sandy shouted back.

"Oh, well, I guess that justifies it, then." Richie poured himself a glass of expensive bourbon and downed it, bottoms up.

"You don't even pay attention to me anymore, everything is always about you, you, you!"

Richie literally spit a mouthful of Van Winkle's all over the floor and gave a good, hearty laugh.

"Always about 'me!?' Oh, fuck me runnin', sometimes I think you should be the comedian! I've given up SO much for you, Sandy. I stopped smoking when you did, I don't drink anymore, I haven't used drugs during the whole course of our marriage! I let you take my life and completely shape it how you wanted. Take a look around!" Richie held out his arms and did a little spin. "This is AAAALLLLLLLLLLLLLLL FOR YOU! Wow, I guess I really AM a selfish fuckin' prick," he took another drink and began shaking his head. "This isn't a marriage. This isn't even a fucking relationship anymore."

"It hasn't been for a long time, Rich," Sandy sheepishly admitted. "...I... I'm not even certain it ever really was."

The truck hit him at 95 MPH, head on. Metaphorically speaking, though in that moment, he would have rather been plowed down by an actual truck. A semi. Let it obliterate his body into a million pieces like his heart had just been by her fierce words.

"Run that by me again?" Richie asked, blinking so intensely his left contact lens nearly popped out of his eye socket.

"Look," Sandy said, softly reaching out for his hands but he pulled away from her.

"No."

"You were the hottest act back then," Sandy said with tears beginning to form in her eyes. "The rising star. I never intended it to go as far as it did."

"So... Wait wait wait, are you telling me that you only got with me in the first place is because I was the flavor of the fucking week?" Richie asked, and somehow through the hysterics, began laughing. "Are you fucking kidding me right now?!"

"Come on, like you didn't get off on that?" Sandy asked. "Mr. Rich 'Records.' Try and tell me you didn't enjoy that ride, having all those women fuck you just because you were famous. You'd be lying if you

tried."

"Yeah. I did," Richie said. "I did until I realize how fake it was. Until I met you. You were the first real person I ever loved!"

"It was lust, Richard," God, he hated when she called him 'Richard.'
"It was never love."

"You don't mean that," Richie gasped.

"Yeah," Sandy nodded. "Richard, I do. Have a good one."

And that was the end of that chapter of his life. Just like that, Sandy packed up her shit and got outta dodge. Left him standing there, alone... as Elton John's "Bennie and the Jets" began playing from his stereo. Oh, the irony of that.

Richie viciously flipped off the door she'd walked out of, at the life she chose to leave, and yelled loudly enough that he hoped she heard him; "Say 'hi' to your mom for me!"

Then he walked back over to his desk and did some more blow. Fuck her.

Years later he found out she had successfully fucked herself into a new marriage and a position as one of the most wealthy lawyers in the Washington law firm. 'Good for her,' Richie thought as he was knee-deep in his drug habit by then. He didn't go near the other stuff anymore. Richie had become a complete addict, and it wasn't even helping his performances anymore. Now it was just something to do, a way of life, a bump before getting out of bed each morning. He couldn't function without it properly anymore. He couldn't present himself on stage. His life went into one hell of a downward spiral.

Eventually he found himself checking into rehab to get the shit out of his system once and for all. It was a struggle, but it had worked and a year later he was clean and ready to get back out on that stage. Making jokes about going to rehab, albeit for having a masturbating addiction over a drug habit. Before his routine took a rather dark turn.

"So, I started wearing glasses again," Richie said to the crowd. "As a

kid they drove me bug shit, but contacts were even worse. I never wanted those damn things. I was married, as some of you know," the crowd clapped, he waved them off. "No, take it from me, you're better off dead, than wed. Seriously, it may have been bliss for awhile but it turned out to be my worst fucking nightmare. Mistakes are scarier than monsters-" Richie burst into laughter over his own joke, but in truth he was holding back the urge to just fucking cry or vomit. Probably a little of both.

"I did so much to make her happy, changed so many things about myself... But it wasn't enough. It was never enough." He trailed off, only looking up when the crowd began laughing and cheering.

"That... wasn't a joke. I .." The crowd drowned him out in more laughter. He looked around the room anxiously. "I .. I'm so fucking alone. I just..." The words couldn't come out of his mouth anymore. He was a lost soul. And through all of this, the crowd just laughed as if it was the funniest thing he'd told yet. This was just a new character, the lonely, depressed guy. Hardy har har fucking har.

"..Well, thank you, fuck you and until next time," Richie said in a cracking voice and fumbled to get the microphone reconnected to the stand, instead it slipped from his shaking hands and it fell to the ground, bouncing and rolling away from him. And the audience raved, they applauded, he even got a standing ovation.

What the fuck was his life anymore?

He was done, out, he decided to was going to quit the business once and for all. Of course, Steve told him how stupid of an idea that was and refused to let him do it.

"This is Hollywood, Rich! The people love you, they want more, more, more!"

"More..." Richie had scoffed. "Everyone ALWAYS wants more, Steve! When is it going to be enough, huh?"

"Never," Steve said bluntly. "Not until your the tragic tale of Rich Records comes to a full stop and just like all those other comedians you die of an O.D. or something. You're still young!"

"I'm thirty-eight..."

"Thirty-eight is the new twenty, buddy! Come on..." Steve said, taking a seat on the couch next to him... and inching his way uncomfortably closer to him by the second. "You're my favorite client, Rich. What can I do to make this better?" Steve had gotten right up next to Rich. Too close for comfort, to be honest. It got even more uncomfortable when Steve reached over... and put his hand on Richie's knee. "I'll do anything to keep you happy, Rich. Just name it. What do you want?"

Richie faked a smile, took Steve's hand, and swiped it away from his knee. "Not that."

"Alright, alright," Steve put his hands up defensively. "You can't blame me for trying, right?"

"Ha. Do all your other clients get such extravagant offers?"

"Look, this never happened, okay?" Steve got off the couch and walked across the room, grabbing something from his desk and extending his out to him.

"What's this?" Richie asked as he lit a cigarette and tilted his head to the side.

"Backstage passes to this new guy, we just started representing him a few months ago. He's hilarious, Rich."

"I prefer the classics," Richie waved him off.

"Give something new a chance. Take the night off. Relax a bit! Go enjoy some fresh material. Look, his name is Chris Shank, he IDOLIZES you! It would mean the world to him if you came to his show tonight. Don't you remember when you started out?"

"Been trying to forget, actually."

"Back when you got to go see all your favorite comedians perform," Steve continued. "Check this kid out, do him a favor."

"ALRIGHT, alright, fucks sake, I'll go. How about you do me a little favor first?" Rich asked. "Got any snow?"

Richie had gotten his fix, which would suffice for the next hour or so as he sat front row at this kids first show as a headliner. Of course, he showed up late and bumped into a dozen people as he was taken to his seat. Immediately he ordered a Bourbon as he looked up at this kid. He was tall and lanky, which made Richie think of him as 'Lanky Shanky,' and he found that more humorous than anything in his act at all. But half way through it, Richie stopped laughing. While the crowd chattered and giggled around him, Richie found himself glaring up at this sack of shit, who was telling a joke that sounded just a tad bit too familiar...

"So," Chris Shank continued. "Last night I walked in on my girl getting fucked by some other guy. What a slut, right?! And this guy, fucking my girl in our home, our fucking bed, he still has his damn business suit on! Like, what, my girl isn't even good enough to fuck naked? Hahaha, eat dicks! So, like, I get home and I see this dude fucking my girl, and I'm standin' there like, 'what is this, do you think I'm some kind of cuck or something?! hahaha. A Cuck, by the way, for those of you who don't know, is when some pitiful sack of shit gets off seeing their wife getting fucked by somebody else, like, what the fuck, right!? This shit is like a legit fetish, what the fuck?! Well as it turns out, homey don't play that shit, you know what I'm sayin'!? Hahahha. So, my girl, it turns out she's been fuckin' around for awhile like it was some dirty little secret. But I knew. Of course I knew, like I know my own jizz okay, and I saw some stains on the sheets that weren't mine, hahaha. Yeah, right? She tried to pull that shit on me of all, 'this is the first time it's ever happened!' And 'he doesn't mean a thing to me. It's social politics or whatever, you know? this is how I get up in the game, and blah blah blah blah! Yeah, let me tell you something, alright? Fuck you too, hahaha. Oh! But then! But then she gets pissed at me when she catches me masturbating to pictures of her friends Twitter! Telling me I need to go to masturbaters anonymous or some shit. Bitch, how about you go to cheating-bitches anonymous! Right?! Hahaha."

Richie sat there completely appalled, livid, full of rage. Had this little shit literally just ripped off his joke? Had it been some bullshit he'd just made up for a quick laugh, that would have been one thing. But this guy took something very personal Richie had said on stage in a moment of despair, and completely fucking lifted it for his own

benefit.

Fuck this.

Richie got up from the table and about knocked it over as he rushed out of the room, leaving the room to enjoy the rest of the set this Chris Shank had probably stolen from others. Rich got himself out to the alley and slammed his face against the brick wall, nearly snapping his glasses in two.

"Fuck.. FUCK!" Richie muttered under his breath, slamming his fists into the wall as well, before kneeling over to vomit. He hadn't felt this sick for a long time.

The door beside him opened and out came that little weasel of a manager, Steve Covall.

"Whoa, Rich! Are you okay?"

"What the FUCK was that in there, Steve?!" Richie pulled the bastard to him by his tie and pushed him against the wall.

"Whoa whoa, what are you talking about, Rich?! Hands off the suit, okay? This is an Armani!"

"What am I talking about? Your new little talent in there ripped off my set!"

"What?" Steve asked. "No he didn't..."

"Steve, open up your fucking ears! It was my act! Almost word for word!"

"Hey... ease up okay? This is probably just a big misunderstanding."

"Misunderstanding? He broke the code! Comedians do NOT do others' jokes! And when I told it, it wasn't even a goddamn joke! That shit really happened to me!"

"Whoa, Sandy actually cheated on you?" Steve asked. "I thought that was just part of your act..."

"Yeah," Richie spat. "Just like everyone else. Nothing on stage is real. It's always about the ha-ha's right?"

"Okay," Steve said, and that really annoyed Richie. He fucking hated it when people had nothing better to respond with than a simplified 'okay.' Imbecilic asshole. "But didn't you divorce for irreconcilable differences?"

"... Because she was fucking around, Steve! I'd call that pretty fucking irreconcilable."

"Okay, okay, breathe, buddy..." Steve said easily. "Look, think of it as like, an homage, okay?"

"Oh 'homage' my ASS! It's theft, is what the fuck it is. Plain and fuckin' simply. Shank is an unoriginal, talentless piece of shit."

"Well hey, at least he changed it enough to make it his own, right?"

Rich glared at his manager, and before he could speak again, he turned and vomited once more. Steve gave him a hearty pat on the back.

"There you go, buddy, let it out. Look, do you need some more coke?"

Richie couldn't honestly believe it. After years of all his work, all his effort, all the time he spent crafting his gift into routine after routine, just so a little shit like this could come in and take it out from under him. He was done, he was just so done. Enough was finally enough.

He shooed Steve away, "Go blow it on your new talent. I'm not the flavor of the week anymore, right?"

Richie turned and staggered down the alley, hoping to just get to his car and drive home so he could sleep the rest of this off. He fished a Winston out of his pocket and gave it a light, leaving a trail of blue smoke in the cold air behind him.

"Alright," Steve called back. "Well hey, you just got home and get a good nights sleep, okay buddy? I'll talk to Shank, work this out. You take care, Rich!"

"Yeah," Richie snapped sarcastically.

His life was the joke. It didn't have a punchline. He understood that now. 'Rich Records' was the bit. All of this was just so fucking phony, and he had finally hit the lowest point of his career. 'Careful what you wish for,' he thought in his head and then chuckled. Just like his idols, he had done the drugs, gone through a horrible marriage, go on to do a stint in rehab, and now, here he was, having his jokes ripped off by Hollywood's new talent. Go fucking figure.

He got in his Mustang and sped off into the night, cranking the radio up to find a Neil Young tune keep him company as he made the lonely drive back to his big, empty house. Almost as empty as he was now. Soon enough it would be filled with tons of junk he never wanted in the first place, just like most rich people tend to do. He was one of them. Just another fucking phony, and he knew it. He caught a glimpse of his eyes in the reflection of his rear-view mirror, and then looked away. The very sight of himself made him so fucking sick.

Old man, take a look at my life, I'm a lot like you...

I need someone to love me the whole day through...

Ah, one look in my eyes And you can tell that's true...

Old man, take a look at my life, I'm a lot like you were...

Richie Tozier went on a binge that weekend, drinking, drugs, the works. Anything to make the sorrows of his life subside for just a few minutes at a time. By all rights he should have been dead, but fate, it seemed had other plans in store for Richie.

First thing on Monday morning, Richie awoke face down on his mess of a bed, hanging off the corner and still wearing his favorite red Cashmere robe on from the night before. His phone had been ringing for who knew how long, which had been easily enough to ignore, but the banging at his door was harder. Groaning, Richie forced himself to roll out of bed and grab his glasses. Each knock sounded like it was going to cause his head to explode with throbbing pain.

"Okay, okay... Fuck me, I'm coming..." Richie said lowly as he inched his way to the door.

He finally managed to undo all the latches, and saw Steve there, pacing back and forth and in a pool of sweat.

"Yowza, boss, what the fuck happened to you?" Richie asked, unenthusiastically. "It's Shank," Steve pushed past him and made his way into the house.

Richie wasn't awake enough for this shit, and the hangover was really hitting him now. "Ughh..." He swung the door closed and walked over to the bar beside his kitchen, making himself some breakfast, which was to say a Winston that was lit first and then a tall glass of Bourbon. Breakfast of champions.

"Really, Rich?" Steve asked. "It's not enough noon yet!"

"It's noon somewhere, so quit your bitchin'," Richie gulped the drink and took a drag off his cigarette. "So? What's with Shank, who'd he rip off this time?"

"This really isn't funny, Rich."

"I've learned that most everything in life is funny, even if in a morbid ironic sense."

"He's dead... Rich."

Richie gulped the rest of his drink down, hard. "Come again?"

"Chris Shank. He's dead!"

Richie fell onto the stool beside him, letting this information soak in for a minute.

"I didn't do it," he said at last.

"Hilarious, Rich. Really. Fucking hysterical. You should tell that one on stage."

"How'd it happen?"

"Guess you haven't been paying attention to the buzz..."

"Do I ever?"

"Well, he got outed. His entire act was ripped off of other comedians, and he got called out on it. Look -"

Steve pulled out his phone and held it up to Richie, who squinted at it. TMZ, go figure. They'd made a compilation of Chris Shank's set pieces, all recorded poorly from shaky phones. After he told a joke, it cut to more professionally recorded footage of other comedians, telling the exact same joke. Funny enough, Richie wasn't among the comedians listed that he'd stolen from. Go figure.

"Huh," Richie said, sliding the phone back over to him. "And?"

"He threw himself from a balcony last night... They had to scrape him up with a shovel, Rich."

"Sheesh..." Richie shuddered, and then poured himself another drink.

He felt bad, he did. Sure, he'd been plenty pissed at the kid for ripping him off, but not to the point where he had wished death on him or anything. Everyone makes mistakes and it's a much better pay off when they live to regret it and learn their lesson.

"Guess this life isn't cut out for everybody."

"Yeah," Steve said, pulling the drink away from Richie and setting it aside.

"So, where do we go from here?" Richie asked.

"Well, Chris was supposed to headline tonight... I need you to cover it, Rich."

"You want me to stand in for the guy who ripped me off? Ha, there's a joke in there somewhere, even through this tragedy."

"Get yourself cleaned up, buddy," Steve said, swiping his phone back and heading for the door. "You're on at 10 PM, sharp."

"Hey," Richie called out. Steve stopped in his tracks and turned back. What was he supposed to say? His jokes were old, stale, just a bunch

of voices he'd done a million times and the same tired material as always. No way he could come up with something new in a matter of hours. He nearly stuttered to get the words out, but finally they came as a spat. "Remember two years ago, the night I met Sandy?"

"Yeah?"

"You'd been telling me you have a really good writing staff."

Just like that. Richie made a deal with the devil. Fuck it, right? What was the point of working endless hours on original comedy if there was every chance there'd be another Chris Shank to come along and rip the material off? At least this way, Richie couldn't feel so stung by it.

"I'll send some of their work your way, see what you can make of it," Steve said before he left. Richie nodded and remained seated in his kitchen, looking at the glass of Bourbon in front of him, and bracing the fact that from here on out, he'd be telling jokes hand-crafted for him by other people. He was already a big phony, anyway.

So, fuck it, he thought. And then those two familiar words came to mind; *Why not?*

Richie went out on stage that night, clean and sober, but ecstatic as ever and greeted the crowd with a big, phony, 'Rich Records' smile. "Hey, everybody. Settle down. The fun is just beginning..."

*Psychic spies from China try to steal your mind's elation
And little girls from Sweden dream of silver screen quotation
And if you want these kind of dreams
It's Californication...*

*It's the edge of the world and all of western civilization
The sun may rise in the East
at least it's settled in a final location
It's understood that Hollywood sells Californication...*

*Pay your surgeon very well to break the spell of aging
Celebrity skin is this your chin or is that war you're waging?
Firstborn, unicorn, Hardcore soft porn*

Dream of Californication
Dream of Californication...